

Lewis County Drug Court Celebrates 100th Graduate

Century Mark: Brandon Hackney Now Moving Toward a Positive Future



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Drug Court 100th Graduate

When Brandon Hackney, 25, graduated from the Lewis County Drug Court last week, he was the 100th person to complete the program. A former addict with a self-described "deadly heroin habit," Hackney entered drug court in 2011 to avoid prison. "My counselor told me today he was proud of me for being remorseful for poisoning my community with drugs," Hackney posted on Facebook about his recovery from



addiction.





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Lewis County Drug Court Celebrates 100th Graduate By Lisa Broadt / lbroadt@chronline.com | 0 comments

On Monday, Lewis County Drug Court celebrated the graduation of its 100th participant; and on Monday, that graduate — Winlock-area resident Brandon Hackney — celebrated a future with more than one path.

For years, Hackney, 25, watched the world through the tunnel vision of his drug addiction.

In the spring of 2011, the former high school athlete overdosed on heroin. He survived but was arrested on several felony charges related to using and dealing drugs. To avoid prison, Hackney agreed to enter Lewis County Drug Court, a rehabilitation program for nonviolent, drug-addicted convicts.

But Hackney never really intended to go, he said. Instead, he ran.

Wanted on five warrants in cities from Chehalis to Seattle, Hackney was on the lam for a week. And then he gave up. He called a Chehalis compliance officer, the father of one of his high school buddies. "Come and pick me up," Hackney remembers telling the officer. "I'll do my time."

"It's weird how you wake up one day and you're at the total bottom," Hackney said.

With no job and few friends — many didn't want to stick around to see his demise — Hackney was as low as he'd ever been. The first month of drug court was a blur, he said. But after a month, things started to clear and he got on board with the drug court program: intensive treatment, frequent check-ins with the drug court judges, and regular and random drug testing.

"My counselor told me today he was proud of me for being remorseful for poisoning my community with drugs," Hackney posted on Facebook. "Wow, I thought. Thirty-four days ago he was betting I'd be in prison now, but 34 clean days later I'm getting the feeling he thinks I'm gonna do this dang thing."

That counselor, Niston Franco, the director of the Eugenia Center, was with Hackney — listening, caring, holding him accountable — throughout the drug court process.

"We use a lifestyle approach that includes a complete surrender to the principles of recovery and Drug Court," Franco wrote in an email. "Becoming a productive member of society, regaining values and morals that were traded off for the immediate gratification of drugs becomes our most important priority."

Slowly, Hackney's self confidence began to return. He went to Narcotics Anonymous meetings, he avoided his old hangouts, he found a job in construction, and on Feb. 4 — after 24 days in jail and 546 days in drug court — Hackney graduated.

With a self-described "deadly heroin habit," Brandon Hackney was the ideal candidate for the Lewis County Drug Court, which has shifted its focus from moderate- to high-risk drug users over the last seven years, according to Jennifer Soper-Baker, the drug court administrator.

Since its inception in 2006, the drug court has had higher retention and greater completion rates with those clients who have numerous felonies and extensive drug addiction; they often respond better to drug court's intensive supervision, Soper-Baker said.

And, because that client pool tends to fall in and out of prison, their treatment offers a cost-effective return on investment.

"You get more bang for your buck if we help them and they find recovery and they don't recitivate," Soper-Baker said.

The drug court receives about half of the approximately \$1 million in 1/10 of 1 percent sales tax collected by Lewis County. Approximately 88 percent of its clients remain drug- and crime-free, according to five-year tracking done by the drug court, Soper-Baker said.

Drug court graduates face their share of challenges: dealing with the stigma of addiction, making amends and paying restitution to society, to name a few.

But those who run the program have faith that their graduates will prevail.

"We try to help them be prepared to deal with life in life terms," Franco, of the Eugenia Center, said. "To get up and keep moving forward regardless of the obstacles and barriers they might face in life."